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Serial No: \_\_\_\_\_

Amendment Filed on: \_\_\_\_\_

*08/16/01*

IN THE CLAIMS

--4. (Amended) A masking agent according to [any one of claims 1 to 3] claim 1, wherein the nontoxic salt of gluconic acid is an alkali metal salt or an alkali earth metal salt of gluconic acid.

5. (Amended) A method for masking flavor and/or odor particular to an oral ingestible product by adding a masking agent according to [any one of claims 1 to 4] claim

1.--

Claims 6-8 (New).